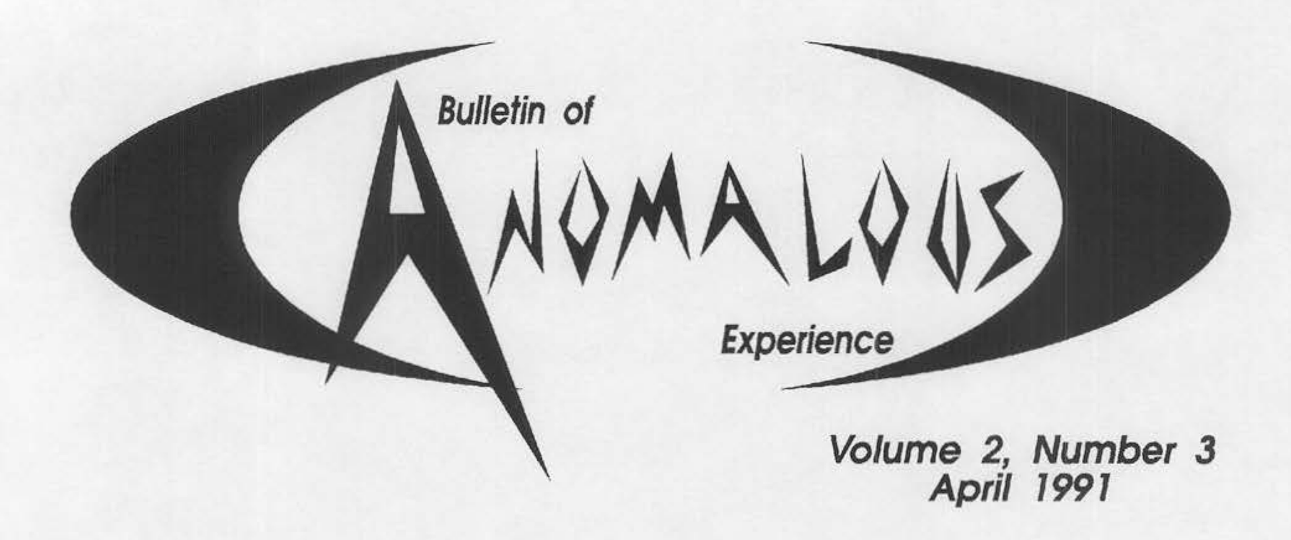


Volume 2, Number 3
April 1991

In This Issue:





Finally... Feedback!

I am very happy with the mail I have been getting in response to the last two issues of BAE. Feedback of any kind is appreciated (as I never tire of repeating), and I have been getting lots of it. Some new readers came on board after the NCAE event; others (mostly Canadians) have joined since an article appeared about my abduction work in a medical newspaper. Slowly but surely we are forming a network of clinicians interested in studying the phenomenon, sharing insights and observations, and helping those affected. Thanks to all who contributed for this issue, with articles, or comments, or a friendly hello!

A special thanks to all who sent in their subscription for the 1991 series of BAE in response to the renewal notice enclosed in the last issue. I was out of pocket a nontrivial amount of money over 1990, but I think in 1991 BAE will be self-supporting (in terms of recovering postage and reproduction costs). For those of you who have not yet sent in your renewal, I am enclosing another little tickler notice.

Next issue, I will be presenting a breakdown of our readership by profession.

Establishing Credibility

For about a month over December and January I was the darling of the local media. I appeared on SHIRLEY, a Canadian version of DONAHUE, along with Stanton Friedman, Phillip Klass, John Robert Colombo (erudite and prolific Canadian author who has written a number of books about anomalous experiences in Canada) and a local skeptic whose only discernible claim to fame was that he used to make up UFO stories for tabloid newspapers.

I was very happy with the way this went. I stuck to clinical issues and highlighted the distress and alienation that some abductees were experiencing, and the importance of compassionate listening. Though the host tried to draw out as many lurid details of individual experiences as possible, and press me for an interpretation (this makes for better television, I suppose), I emphasized that the important point is that something is going on (though I refused to pin myself down to a particular explanation) that deserves listening and study.

I used a similar approach on a radio interview on Quirks and Quarks, a CBC-Radio science program, and, perhaps most importantly, in a article for the Medical Post (a biweekly medical newspaper distributed to all Canadian physicians). The focus in the Medical Post article was on the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder found in some abductees.

Much interest from the medical community was generated from this article, including correspondence with the chief psychiatrist at a teaching hospital, and several requests for subscriptions from physicians presumably new to this business.

This reinforces my belief that acceptance, and further study, of this phenomenon by mainstream science and medicine can come from soberly collecting and reporting raw data, identifying signs and symptoms (which physicians can relate to) that comprise a new syndrome of unknown etiology, and working from there to determine prevalence, pathophysiology, etc.

Bulletin of Anomalous Experience is a networking newsletter about the UFO "Abduction" phenomenon and related issues for interested scientists and mental health professionals.

BAE provides a forum for dissemination of information and insights, and ongoing debate. We try to comfortably tread the narrow path between the groves of academia and the dust and heat of the market-place, inquiring and suggesting, not asserting or insisting (in the words of Hilary Evans). If you have something to say, here is a place to say it. If you have a question or a problem, here is a place to ask for help.

BAE is contribution-driven. I see my role not as an editor but as a chairman of a series of ongoing, parallel discussions. Editorial comments and introductions are identified by italics.

When you're done with this issue, write me! Tell me what you think of this issue. What are your experiences (personal and clinical), your conclusions, your questions? What topics do you think should be covered? If you prefer to be anonymous, that's perfectly fine.

Frequency of publication is nominally bimonthly, but may turn out to be more often if the volume of contributions warrant.

Distribution is limited to mental health professionals and interested scientists. Requests for subscriptions (at $20 per calendar year, a real bargain!) are welcome. A set of back issues from 1990 is also $20. Cash or money orders would be preferred to cheques -- my bank charges big bucks to deal with cheques drawn on U.S. banks. Write to

David Gotlib, M.D.
1365 Yonge Street, Suite 200
Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4T 2P7
Telephone (416) 963-8700



from Barbara Boyle (RN):

I believe that your newsletter is playing a critical role, as mental health professionals begin to grapple with what may well be the beginnings of the greatest crisis in human history. If the worst-case scenario hypothesis is true -- that of rapidly increasing alien intrusion towards humanity -- the resultant world-wide mental health crisis will be staggering.

If this scenario is correct, we all are obviously way behind the eight-ball in terms of preparation for being able to deal with this crisis. A most basic and fundamental part of such preparation is the establishment of an effective and far-reaching networks of mental health professionals to address this problem.

If the worst-case scenario is not what is really happening, the network is still essential, as it will help us all to more quickly address and answer another critical problem -- that is, what the heck is going on?

In short -- I feel that your newsletter is an extremely valuable forum. I applaud your courage and admire the great job that you have done. A sane, practical and needed breath of fresh air in a field (ufology) where so often so much talent and energy is wasted in less useful directions.

from Brian Thompson (MD):

The electromagnetic stuff interests me. While I'm aware of some of the more conventional thinking on EMF and biological tissues/systems, I also am receptive to people who tell me that they disrupt banking machines and/or computers. Two people have reported "Street Light Interference" in the context of "I never heard of this happening to anybody else, and I never mentioned this to anybody else, BUT when I go by a street light..."

from Hilary Evans (author & researcher):

Many thanks for the latest issue, in which I am embarrassed to find myself so recurrent. Many thanks, though for awarding me so much space. I hope you realise that any mild traces of belligerence in my letter were due to my desire to make my point clearly; they were certainly not intended as any criticism either of your views or of the way you conduct your bulletin, which comfortably treads the narrow path between the groves of academia and the dust and heat of the market-place, inquiring and suggesting, not asserting or insisting. I hope I shall manage to be more constructive in any future input.

from Jean Mundy (psychologist):

I need to find some backers who want to get the story out about the effects of UFO contact. I have a play ready to perform based on a true story of a contact. Now I need the money to produce it. They play is called "Believe Me!" and tells what happens when a military family has a close encounter. It is a serious drama with much comic relief. We had a reading in NYC at Play Lab and it was well received by a full house of 60. If you are interested in helping out, write to Dr. Jean Mundy, 33 Windward Lane, East Hampton, New York 11937.

Jean Mundy also contributed a letter to the editor of OMNI in response to a recent item on abductions:

I take issue with the statements in Patrick Huyghe's article "UFO Update." He reports the U. of Minn. study that people who claim an alien abduction are "disturbed" and are the victims, not of Aliens, but of sexual abuse. But he does not report other psychological studies which have confirmed the original report by Dr. A. Clamar that people who report UFO abduction stories are mentally healthy. Why the difference in conclusions from similar studies? In Dr. Clamar's study the researchers did not know, until after they had reached their conclusions, that the subjects had reported an Alien abduction. However, if a therapist holds the belief that Aliens do not exist and is faced with a patient who is reporting Alien abduction, the therapist may "logically" conclude that the subject is "paranoid." The psychotherapist is not deliberately lying. It's just that each of us hangs on to our sanity by vigorously defending our own world-view. If someone challenges your belief system you have a choice between "You must be crazy," or "My view of reality has been wrong all this time." Most people, even psychologists, will opt for calling the other person crazy. I wonder how a Christian Priest, explaining how he starts the day by drinking the blood of God, would be diagnosed by an Alien Psychologist who never heard the Christ message. The point is, even in our advanced scientific society, one will be judged "normal" if one matches the belief system of the examiner. If you want to know if abductees are really "disturbed" you must have them be examined by psychologists who believe that Aliens are visiting this planet, or at least keep their abduction story a secret until after the psychological reports are written.

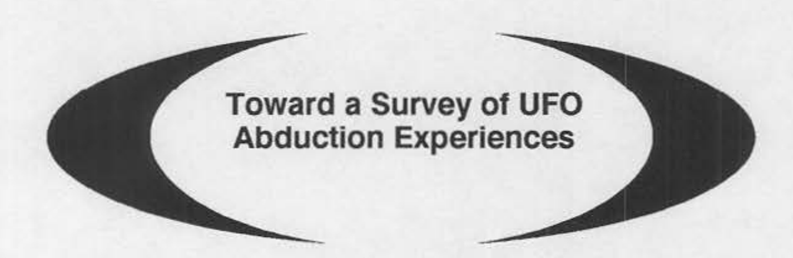
By the way, I believe that Aliens ARE visiting this planet, so, of course, I think abductees are, for the most part, sane. Some of my professional colleagues, who believe that Aliens don't exist, have expressed fears about MY sanity. So there you are.



Wherein our readers present profiles of themselves, their points of view and particular interests. Collect them! Trade them!

Don C. Donderi
McGill University Department of Psychology
1205 Dr. Penfield Avenue
Montreal, Quebec H3A 1B1
Phone: 514-398-6310
Fax: 514-398-4896
e-mail: PS20@MusicA.McGill.CA

I am an Associate Professor of Psychology at McGill University. My research interests are in human visual perception and memory, and my professional work is as a human factors/ergonomics consultant. I have been actively interested in UFOs since about 1966. As a member of the old NICAP (National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena) I participated on an "occupant panel" which NICAP established in order to get some professional evaluation of six quite varied, and very early, "occupant" cases. For a long while, (1974-1981) I was a member of UFO-Quebec, a French-language UFO group which published a quarterly journal quite regularly, until all of us (college professors, teachers, writers, professional men, businessmen, tradesmen and chicken farmers), just ran out of time and energy. I am still interested in the UFO phenomenon: from every point of view. My interest in UFOs is well known in my own university community, as is my position, which is that the phenomenon is not just "psychological."



The big news from the National Conference on Anomalous Experience held in January (reported on in our last issue) was a grant towards a comprehensive survey of the prevalence of abduction experiences. Ed Bullard sent his thoughts on such a survey:

Little is certain about UFO abductions except their being frequent and widespread. Had the Hill case remained an isolated incident, abduction would be no more than a curiosity. Instead the floodgates have opened, slowly at first but ever wider during the past decade, until we are inundated with reports. Many of us have found that friends and acquaintances have had the experience, or show distinctive signs of it. Clearly this phenomenon is tremendous in scale. Rough estimates suggest perhaps 3% of the population -- several million people -- have undergone the experience.

Just how widespread is this phenomenon? Before abductions command the attention they deserve, before any ultimate understanding is possible, this basic question needs an answer, and in principle an answer is feasible. Thanks to generous funding for a national survey, that answer may be forthcoming.

Past efforts to survey extranormal experiences on a large scale have included the "Census of Hallucinations" carried out by the Society for Psychicial Research in 1894, Andrew M. Greeley's The Sociology of the Paranormal: A Reconnaissance (1975), sponsored by the National Opinion Research Center, and various folklore studies. Folklorists have favored in-depth, face-to-face interviews over mass surveys in most inquiries about strange experiences (e.g. Gillian Bennett, Tradition of Belief, and Patricia Lysaght, The Banshee). Folklorists also have concentrated on beliefs and traditional ideas more often than experiences. A few studies have used questionnaires to gather extensive data on personal experiences (e.g., Leea Virtanen, "That Must Have Been ESP!").

One advantage these inquiries have over any survey of abductions is that the informants maintain conscious recall of the events. An abduction survey faces the formidable handicap of informants who may not know that they were abducted, or know only in fragmentary form. This problem may make the abduction phenomenon unique in survey history. In any case this literal pursuit of the unknown poses an unenviable challenge to the formulators of the survey.

Any recognition of abductions through a survey must be inferential, and the results taken as layers of probability. The OMNI questionnaire of 1988 drew many responses from people who suspected that they had this experience; this group constitutes the conscious tip of the iceberg. The problem here remains how to separate the true abductees from mistaken or deluded claimants. Positive responses to certain questions or groups of questions would almost certainly identify an abductee, but a survey that netted only these respondents would grossly underestimate the total abductee population. At the other extreme there are many events, images, and feelings associated with abduction and potential clues to its occurrence, though few if any of these elements are uniquely connected to abduction. Any conclusions drawn from this broader pool of possibilities would overestimate the prevalence.

A two-part study might be the only solution to this dilemma. After a broad survey on a national scale to find how widespread abduction symptoms really are, in-depth interviews of a sample of respondents might separate true from apparent abductees. With the measuring-rod calibrated in this way, reliable estimates of abduction throughout the population could be made. At this stage data could be gathered about the abductees themselves and thereby fill in an important but little-known area in our understanding.

The following quote expresses some of the difficulties in composing an effective survey:

(italics for the following)

A questionnaire ought to...elicit maximum information on as many aspects as possible of its subject [but] must not contain leading questions or anything that is likely to give the reader the impression that the information he has is known previously and therefore of no interest. Neither must a questionnaire be so short that it does not present a challenge nor so long that it overburdens those to whom it is directed. In view of such factors the drafting of a questionnaire contains an element of the art of the impossible (Lysaght, p. 21).

Different belief systems add a further complication. Religious persons might conceive of abduction phenomena in terms of angels and demons, children in terms of imaginary playmates or bogeymen, people with strong folk or ethnic ties in terms of cultural traditions of the supernatural.

These differences gain importance in light of the sensitiveness of the subject matter. Many people become defensive in discussing their experiences with the strange and respond only to acceptable inquiries. Bennett cautions that when she began interviews with retired British women, the question, "Do you believe in ghosts?" invariably received a flat "No," and the word "supernatural" met with a negative response. The women usually denied any such experiences and sometimes reacted with hostility to a research project into supernatural phenomena. Learning from these rebuffs, Bennett became more vague in her inquiries, asking about "the mysterious side of life" and adopting the vocabulary of her informants for mysterious events. She found that a "spirited" house was acceptable terminology where "haunted" was not. These lead-ins proved less threatening and unlocked a rich treasure of experience -- we would call it supernatural, but the term was taboo to the informants. They also favored the interview over the questionnaire, since the latter demanded a yes-or-no answer whereas the former allowed qualifications (pp. 26-27). The stigma attached to "superstitious" belief or any perceived deviance from the accepted world view deters forthright discussion of mysterious experience. This reluctance should be taken into account even when the instrument of inquiry is an impersonal questionnaire.

A journey of a thousand miles begins with the first stop, so what follows is perhaps a first step in sorting out the phenomenology of abductions. The data in Table 1 on the following page comes from reports in the literature, variable in the amount of information they contain, the quality and the duration of the research. I have attempted to draw out the consciously remembered features, then the unconscious but striking elements that might break through into conscious recall. An unaware abductee would likely respond positively to some of these traits. The frequencies listed here are relative and not absolute; many published accounts track aftereffects only over the short run, so the cited frequencies are provisional.

This data represents the bare bones of reports stripped of individual specifics. Any actual witness might not recognize such sterile categories as applying to his own experience, so expressions closer to the ones used in reports might sound more natural to respondents. I have no expertise in survey construction, but perhaps this data will prove useful to those who do. Best of luck in a difficult task.

Table 1: Phenomenology of Abductions

	Reliable Cases (N = 175)	All Cases (N = 252)
Place of experience		
Out-of-doors	70	
Highway	59	
Home	42	
Uncertain	04	
Conscious Memories		
Primary conscious observation prior to time lapse or entry into UFO		
UFO (aerial or landed, luminous or dark) [figures include all UFOs below]	117	167
nothing	23	32
being without UFO	16	27
luminosity or beam of light	6	24
being and UFO visible	30	
beam and UFO visible	9	
sound and UFO	9	
beings and sound	4	
beings and light beam	1	
sound and light beam	4	
UFO, light, beings	11	
UFO, light, sound	4	
UFO, beings, sound	4	
UFO, light, beings, sound	1	
luminous cloud only	2	2
sound only	2	
Initial perceptions, behaviors, feelings		
vacuum, isolation	24	33
act as if controlled by outside influence		19
perceptual distortions		8
feeling of pressure, headache		8
premonition that something will happen		7
Effects on exterior objects		
(A) Machinery		
electromagnetic effects on car, TV		47
vehicle acts as if on its own		26
unusual ride (eg vehicle floats, repetitive scenery)		16
magnetic effect on watches, compasses		10
(B) Animal responses		20
Conscious feelings and events subsequent to time lapse or exit from UFO		
other encounters	59	
other sightings		46
other abductions		31
relatives and friends involved in UFO events		11
Physical aftereffects	49	
burns, sunburn, blisters		23
eye problems (eg water, burn, itch)		22
cuts, scars, punctures		20
motility, balance, coordination problems		14
gastrointestinal upset		13
illness healed		13
dehydration, thirst		12
headache, tension, nervous stress		11
disturbed sleep pattern		10
Paranormal aftereffects	39	
apparitions appear		24
ESP abilities develop, experiences occur		20
Men in Black		15
poltergeist phenomena		14
Mental aftereffects	31	
nightmares, abduction dreams		42
feeling of obligation to keep experience secret		26
memory return, bleedthrough memories		24
anxiety, panic in ordinary situations		16
Personality change	18	
improvement		20
deterioration		11
Exterior changes		
wristwatch impaired		16
car impaired		11

	Reliable Cases (N = 175)	All Cases (N = 252)
Hidden memories		
Missing time	139	164
relocation (witness travels distance unawares)		54
unconsciousness		35
disorientation, semiconsciousness		26
Beings observed	128	
Physical traits of beings		
humanoid	86	
human	15	
short or average height	71	
large eyes	61	
pale, gray or ashen skin	55	63
hairless	52	52
large head	50	53
small mouth	44	
small nose	39	
Social, personal traits		
friendly and reassuring	71	
cruel, indifferent		53
one being serves as leader	33	41
evasive, deceitful, secretive	33	
Communication of some sort	102	
telepathy	64	
instructions to forget experience	41	
beings promise to return or claim long-term watch over witness	38	
warning or prophecy (often apocalyptic)	24	
Mental control	90	
inappropriate calmness		42
odd or uncharacteristic actions		34
somnambulism, lassitude		27
sense of rapture		18
sense of peace alternates with terror		11
Examination recalled	79	
table	62	
scanning device	34	
thoughts altered, mission imparted	33	
implant or interest in neural system	26	
concern with reproduction	24	
Flotation	58	90
weightlessness		33
levitation in light beam		29
drawn by force		18
out-of-body experience		16
false feeling of flotation		11
immateriality		4
Movement controlled	67	
paralysis		61
tingling, electric sensation		18
feeling of heaviness		13
invisible barrier		6
move in slow motion		3
Means of control		
sound accompanies control		29
control by touch		18
control by devices		15
touch relieves pain		8
sensation of burning accompanies control		7
control by beam of light		6
hypnotic eyes		5
repetitious voice		5
Interior of craft		
diffuse, fluorescent lighting	47	55
cold, misty atmosphere	33	
circular, oval or domed room	31	46
breathing difficulties, heavy air	19	21
Barren, devastated otherworld, indications that beings have suffered a disaster	18	



The following is a summary of Ken Ring's latest study, published in the most recent JUFOS. I thought it was important enough to present here, even though some of you probably already receive JUFOS. (If you don't, you should. The first issue had an excellent series of articles on abductions).

The Omega Project: A Psychological Survey of Persons Reporting Abductions and Other UFO Encounters

Kenneth Ring and Christopher J. Rosing

Journal of UFO Studies, n.s. 2, 1990, 59-98

Abstract

Two hundred sixty-four persons participated in a mail questionnaire survey the purpose of which was to assess the role of psychological factors in influencing susceptibility to UFO encounters, especially of the abduction type, as well as to evaluate a range of aftereffects stemming from such encounters. Responses of persons in the UFO encounter group (n=97) were compared to groups made up of 1) persons interested in UFOs, but having no significant UFO-related experience (n=39); 2) persons who had undergone another distinctive anomalous encounter, viz., a near-death experience (n=74); and 3) persons interested in near-death experiences (n=54). Results showed that persons reporting abductions were psychologically indistinguishable from those who had other types of UFO encounters. However, UFO experiencers in general, while not more fantasy-prone than their controls, reported more sensitivity to non-ordinary realities as children, as well as a higher incidence of child abuse and trauma than controls. They also reported far more psychophysical changes following their encounters than did controls. An especially intriguing finding of this study was that the UFO experiencers and near-death experiencers are highly comparable psychologically and are affected similarly by their separate encounters, suggesting that these two categories of experiences may in many ways be functionally equivalent.

Categories of respondents

UFO Experiencers: (1) Abductees; (2) Others.
UFO Controls
NDE Experiencers
NDE Controls

UFO respondents were obtained from four separate sources: Abduction researchers Budd Hopkins and Joseph Nyman; the Communion Network organized by Anne and Whitley Strieber; rosters of attendees of Leo Sprinkle's 1987 and 1988 summer UFO conferences at the University of Wyoming; and rosters of attendees of John White's 1987 and 1988 autumn UFO conferences in North Haven, Connecticut.

The Omega Project Battery

1. Background Information Sheet. Basic demographic information

2. Experience and Interest Inventory. Determines experiential and interest history. Used for final assignment to appropriate experiential or control group.

3. Childhood Experience Inventory. Assesses the incidence of unusual psychological and paranormal experiences in childhood, including fantasy proneness, psychic sensitivity and susceptibility to alternate realities (29 items). Findings:

- no evidence that either UFOErs or NDErs are distinctively characterized by tendencies toward fantasy proneness.
- persons who as adults report UFOEs or NDEs are apparently already sensitive to non-ordinary realities (and this is particularly true of the UFOE respondents).

4. Home Environment Inventory. Solicits information on factors related to child abuse and other childhood traumas. This inventory consists of separate scales that are designed to measure physical abuse and punishment, sexual abuse, psychological abuse, neglect, and negative home atmosphere (38 items). Findings:

- there is a clear-cut and consistent tendency for experiential respondents in both categories to report a greater incidence of childhood abuse and trauma. UFOErs and NDErs are very similar to one another on this factor, and both differ markedly from the control groups.
- experiential respondents in both categories are much more likely to affirm that they were seriously ill as children, suggesting that in this way, too, their childhoods were a source of greater stress to them, than were those of our control respondents.

5. Psychological Inventory. Provides a measure of tendencies toward psychological dissociation. Sample items seek to determine respondents' propensity to "blank out" unaccountably, be unresponsive to the physical environment, lose themselves in a state of inward absorption, spontaneously self-hypnotize, daydream frequently, and so on (40 items). Findings:

- experiencers do score higher than controls, with UFOE respondents scoring highest of all and UFO respondents in general tend to score higher than their counterparts in the ND categories.

6. Psychophysical Changes Inventory. Covers a wide range of psychophysical changes, including

- physical sensitivities (increase in sensitivity to light/hearing/humidity),
- neurological (difference in nervous system, brain structure) and physiological functioning (metabolic rate, body temperature, blood pressure),
- psychoenergetic functioning (increase in energy currents in body, decrease in sleep time),
- emotional lability,
- states of expanded mental awareness (mind expansion, information flooding),
- awareness of paranormal phenomena (psychic abilities, causing electric or electronic equipment to malfunction)

(60 items total).

Findings:

- experiential respondents underwent many more psychophysical changes following their experience....These span a spectrum from apparent biologically-mediated effects through psychoenergetic and psychokinetic functioning to psychological states suggestive of expanded mental awareness....we find an undeniable pattern of overall similarity between our UFOers and NDErs.
- experiential respondents claimed significantly more often than controls that after their encounters they were more likely to cause electrical or electronic equipment (eg electric lights, digital watches, computers, etc.) to malfunction.
- some of the changes on this inventory appear to correspond to the "kundalini" phenomenon ..kundalini may be regarded as part of, and possibly underlying, the pattern of psychophysical changes we have already reported. Kundalini activation is much more likely to be reported afterwards by experiential respondents than controls, and, as before, this is equally true for NDErs and UFOers alike.

7. Life Changes Inventory. Assesses changes in personal values and interests., Sample domains covered by this inventory include appreciation of life, self acceptance, concern for others, concern for impressing others, materialism, concern for social and planetary issues, quest for meaning, spirituality and religiousness (50 items).

8. Religious Beliefs Inventory. Provides an overall measure of the extent to which respondents shift toward a generalized universalistic spiritual (rather than sectarian religious) perspective. (12 items).

Findings from (7) and (8):

- there is a reported shift in the direction of increased altruism, social concern and spirituality for all groups. These changes are somewhat more pronounced for our experiential respondents and are significantly greater for the following scales: Appreciation for life, self-acceptance, concern for others, materialism (decrease), quest for meaning and spirituality. The ND sample shifted more than the UFO sample on altruistic (increase) and materialistic (decrease) values, the changes being significant on concern for others, impressing others, and materialism.
- the overall trend of these data is that individuals who have become involved in the world of NDEs or UFOs, whether through personal experience or simply personal interest, tend to state that on the whole it has made a positive difference in their lives.

9. Opinion inventory. Assesses respondents' understanding of their experience (or interest) and its impact on their beliefs and opinions. This inventory is particularly concerned with three opinion sectors: 1) possible evolutionary implications of NDEs and UFOs; 2) a personal sense of purpose behind these experiences; and 3) possible extraterrestrial influence in human affairs (30 items).

- there is widespread agreement across all groups with statements implying that we are in the midst of an evolutionary spurt toward greater spiritual awareness and higher consciousness -- and that the occurrence of UFOEs and NDEs is an integral part of that progression.
- as to the question of a larger purpose behind the emergence of NDEs and UFOs in our time, we see a different pattern begin to emerge. First, it is clear that our respondents are inclined to agree that there are "higher forces" orchestrating these experiences and that they are meant to awaken individuals to the existence of a larger cosmic plan for life on earth ...Second, it is equally clear that though purpose is ascribed to the occurrence of these experiences, what kind of purpose is discerned differs radically for our two categories of experiences. Those who have had or become interested in NDEs are inclined to see a religious meaning to NDEs, specifically, to "spread God's love." Our UFO sample, on the other hand, is much less likely to endorse this opinion, and this is true for experiencers and controls alike who split 50-50 on this interpretation. Here, for one of the few times in this study, we finally have a difference to note between our UFO and ND sample. And that difference seems to grow even stronger when we consider our last opinion domain, that of possible extraterrestrial influence in earthly activities.

(Here) it is literally a difference of opinion over the possible role of extraterrestrial influence in human life. In broad terms, it's easy to state this difference: our UFO respondents tend to be more convinced that extraterrestrial forces are at work on earth than our ND respondents, who consistently reject such claims...

Virtually all comparisons show that all four experiential groups were not significantly different from one another (though, collectively, they did tend to differ from the control group on most measures)...Those reporting abduction episodes are NOT a psychologically distinctive group compared to others who have had different UFO-related experiences.

Interpretation

(Our experiencers) are what we might call psychological sensitives with low stress thresholds...it is their traumatic childhoods that have helped to make them so...these individuals are the unwitting beneficiaries of a kind of compensatory gift in return for the wounds they have incurred in growing up. And that is through the exigencies of their difficult childhoods they also come to develop an extended range of human perception beyond normally recognized limits.

Special Analyses of UFO Sample

(The source of our UFO experiencers) differentiates respondents ideologically, but not psychologically.

Being hypnotized did not make a difference, at least insofar as affecting responses to our questionnaires was concerned. Overall, the data are unambiguous: people who come to be hypnotized in connection with their UFOEs are indistinguishable from those who have not been with respect to their developmental histories, mode of psychological functioning and reported aftereffects.

Women report that both psychophysically and spiritually they are more affected by their involvement in the UFO world than are men, regardless of whether they have had a UFO encounter as such.

Conclusions

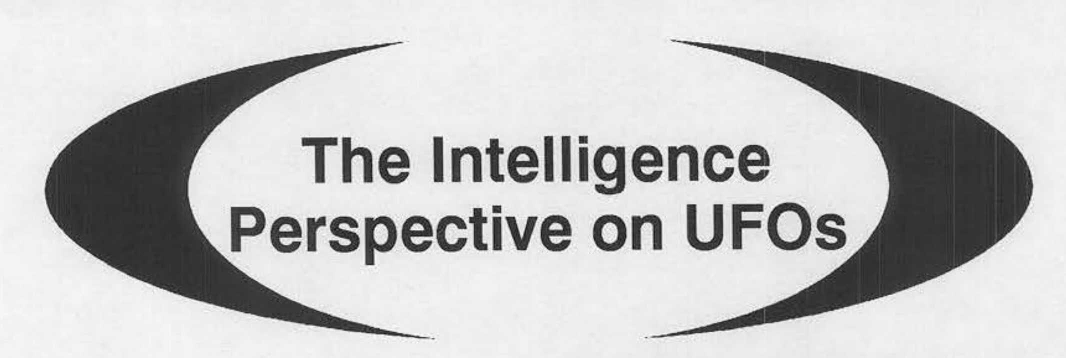
First, what repeatedly struck us most forcibly was the undeniable overall similarity between our two experiential groups, UFOErs and NDErs. Our findings demonstrate that both groups share a similar developmental history, similar modes of psychological functioning and a similar range of aftereffects, both psychophysical and attitudinal.

What this implies to us is that in our search for explanations for UFOEs and NDEs, we should now consider that despite the differences in the nature of these experiences, they may have a common underlying source -- whatever that source may be.

Second, although the kind of psychological and social psychological factors that were assessed in this study may not cause these phenomena, they unquestionably sensitize people to them. What the Omega Project unequivocally demonstrates is that in fact not just anyone is likely to report undergoing a UFOE or NDE; those who do are distinctive in various ways, as our study makes clear.

...(As to) the always question, "What is the source of these UFOEs?" our finding do precisely nothing to settle on which is the correct answer to this ultimate question...but it would be a mistake to suppose that simply because our data do not help to resolve the ontological status of UFOEs, they lead to a dead end. On the contrary, our main point here which needs to be repeated and stressed is that what we have found forces us to acknowledge the role of psychological and social psychological factors in UFOEs (and NDEs too, for that matter). What we are suggesting, in short, is that whatever the ultimate resolution of the UFO question may turn out to be (assuming it can ever be answered definitively), UFO researchers would do well to focus some of their attention on these factors, for we believe we have shown that important clues to this mystery may lie buried in this ground. More specifically, we think it will prove to be relatively fruitless to continue to debate the question of the psychology of UFOErs on such gross levels as overall psychopathology. More rewarding, in our opinion, would be further specific exploration of the role of child abuse or such factors as imaginality in fostering these experiences or in more detailed studies of the relationship between dissociation and reports of UFO encounters...we acknowledge that many different psychological perspectives may prove useful, and that, in the end, psychological perspectives in themselves may not be sufficient to encompass the full range of UFO phenomena...

Finally, we must, needless to say, recognize the many limitations of this study, especially its total reliance on self-report measures and in some cases previously untested measures. If there is to be any hope of providing definitive answers to the many questions the Omega Project has raised, we must now move beyond this kind of research. We need in-depth psychological studies of experiencers, something that has not yet been attempted either in ufology or near-death studies. And we also need careful laboratory studies of experiencers and controls to assess the reality of the psychophysical changes reported here....In any event, our report is submitted in the hope that others will soon begin to penetrate the psychological and psychophysical terrain whose edges we have scarcely crossed here.



Don Donderi sent in this wonderful essay. Required reading!

The Intelligence Perspective on UFOs

The intelligence perspective on UFOs is not a scientific perspective, as science is now understood and practiced. Scientific intelligence is something entirely different. A book which explains this idea very clearly is Most Secret War: British Scientific Intelligence, 1939-1945 by R.V. Jones (London, Hamish Hamilton, 1978). The author was the director of Scientific Air Intelligence for the British during World War II. At several points in the book, Jones points out the dangers of relying on one's own scientists for an assessment of what the "enemy" is capable of doing.

The reason is simple. "Your" scientists are following their own ideas. They are using techniques they understand to do things which they know how to do. They are professionally unprepared to concede that the "enemy's" scientists might have different ideas, or different techniques, which produce weapons or technologies which "your" scientists have not yet thought to develop. "Your" scientists, in other words, will only be prepared to recognize exactly what they are working on. If you find evidence that the enemy has developed another weapon or technique, "your" scientists may not even be prepared to believe that it is possible.

In Britain, during the Second World War, Jones (in 1939, a 28-year old physics Ph.D. himself, but with an "intelligence" viewpoint), had to convince very sceptical, very senior audiences of unbelieving scientists that (1) the Germans were using electronic beam guidance for their bombers over Britain, and (2) that the Germans were building a ballistic missile -- the V2 -- which was capable of reaching Britain. Needless to say, both discoveries -- made by Jones' scientific intelligence service -- were correct.

The parable of the blind men feeling an elephant is also relevant. Each scientist specialist is like one of the blind men, dealing only with the speciality that he or she is trained in, and never venturing outside that relatively narrow field of specialization. As a result, each scientists, reacting to a large, complex phenomenon, picks out the part that he or she understands, and confidently preaches that the whole consists of just that part.

It requires a much broader perspective to appreciate the UFO phenomenon. The scientific "blind man" will say: The data I pay attention to are just about fitted by my theory (say, electrical fields, created by tectonic strain, producing light or influencing susceptible brains). There is no "other data": all the rest is explained as "noise" from my grand, but narrow, approximation.

The scientific specialist is not interested in constructing, and does not try to construct, a "broader picture:" one which deals with the established phenomena from a variety of sources: consistent abduction accounts, trace evidence, accumulated CEIII accounts, radar-visual evidence, etc.

The "scientist's" defense is that if a plausible hypothesis can be constructed within a conventional specialist field (say, psychological personality aberrations) then it is intellectually more appealing to accept the "conventional" hypothesis, despite its poor approximation to the actual evidence, then it is to speculate on a hypothesis for which we can produce no mechanism acceptable to our understanding or to our peers.

This defense is, of course, exactly the intelligence trap which Jones warned us about! "Science" works quite effectively within well-established channels, but it takes a major theoretical upheaval to send it out of those channels. Evidence that "science" is not coping well with explaining a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon is not received well by scientists. Their business is explanation, not exploration.

Exploration and extrapolation from raw data are no longer high scientific values. You have to look a long way to find the unreconstructed naturalist, or laboratory tinkerer, who works from the evidence to the hypotheses, and not the other way around. This relatively rare scientist type may be far better qualified than the average scientist to play the role of the "scientific intelligence expert."

The art of scientific intelligence is to look both widely and critically at the inter-related phenomena of interest. There will always be misleading clues, especially where human testimony is involved. The scientific UFO intelligence expert has to be interested in many questions simultaneously. Can "contactees" be separated from "abductees?" Are there sub-classes of "abductees?" Is there consistency across hypnosis and non-hypnosis abduction accounts? Are there correlations between physical traces and abduction accounts? How much independence is there in abduction accounts? Can we find evidence of "con-

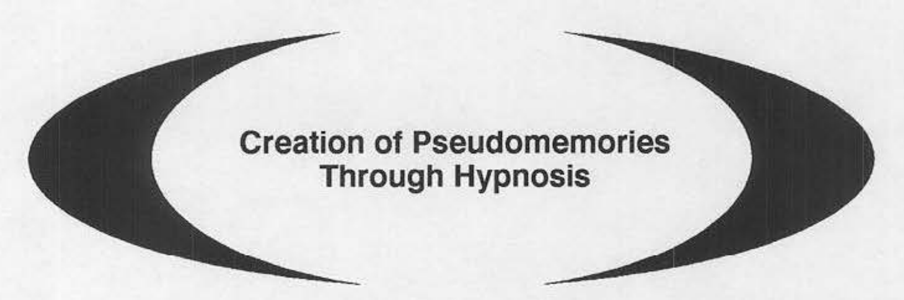
tagion" in the reporting of abductions? Is there consistency over time in these reports? Are there psychological correlates of abduction experiences? Are these correlates a cause of, or an effect of, the experiences? What about abduction "defenses:" are these psychological -- or "real?"

At no time will it be possible to give a definitive answer to all of these questions. Nevertheless, it is the scientific intelligence expert's job to provide tentative answers to all of the relevant questions on the basis of existing evidence, and to draw the most likely conclusion from the broad spectrum of available evidence.

By filling in your own answers to the questions in the paragraph above, you can build your own "big picture." There are probably other questions to ask, and other areas of evidence to consider. Having opened up the approach, I will close this short note by suggesting that the most telling question one can ask about a "scientific" UFO theory is -- how much of the available evidence does it gloss over or leave out?

"Intelligence" conclusions are always more risky than "scientific" conclusions. Intelligence conclusions are always presented as a basis for action; not just contemplation. On the other hand, "scientific" conclusions are apt to be so risk-less and behind times as to be totally useless in anticipating and preparing for an uncertain future.

The irony of this story is that R.V. Jones, my hero of "scientific intelligence" -- now an 80-year-old retired professor of physics at the University of Aberdeen, thinks that UFOs are nonsense. Jones was something of a practical joker, and played "UFO" jokes on his own investigators in the relaxed days after the end of the war. I corresponded with him about ten years ago, and found him unconvinced about the whole thing on the basis of the evidence available to him. My conclusions are different -- but they have been reached by his own methods!



Creation of Pseudomemories Through Hypnosis

That hypnosis is a state of heightened suggestibility, and hypnotic recall in general is not necessarily 100% accurate, is not in dispute, even among most "true believers." Skeptics extrapolate from this fact to assert that abduction experiences are "created" in a highly imaginative or "fantasy-prone" subject eager to please an investigator who is asking leading questions himself.

That's a huge, and unwarranted (in my opinion) leap. Still, we should acquaint ourselves with the various pitfalls in hypnosis. To that end, here are excerpts from a study that demonstrates that subjects with strong hypnotic abilities and high imagery preference are particularly vulnerable to suggested distortion of memory, given the appropriate context.

Hypnotizability, Preference for an Imagic Cognitive Style, and Memory Creation in Hypnosis

Louise Labelle, Jean-Roch Laurence, Robert Nadon, and Campbell Perry

Concordia University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada

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Abstract

We sought to extend the finding (Laurence & Perry, 1983) that it is possible through hypnosis to create a pseudomemory of a specific event. Subjects were compared on their responses to a hypnotic suggestion. We also examined the relation between nonhypnotic measures (Preference for an Imagic Cognitive Style [PICS] test and the Tellegen Absorption Scale [TAS]) and response to the suggestion. Highly (45.45%) and moderately-highly (46.15%) susceptible subjects believed that the pseudomemory was veridical, but none of the low susceptible subjects did so. Together, hypnotic susceptibility, the PICS, and their interaction more strongly predicted pseudomemory creation than any of these main effects alone. Performance on the TAS was also related to the occurrence of pseudomemory, but this relation was redundant with performance on the other measures. These results point to the complexity of the variables involved in pseudomemory creation during hypnosis.

Introduction

Why do subjects integrate an imagined or a suggested memory modification into their recall of a prior event? As Nadon et al (1987) demonstrated, hypnotizability is related to a number of cognitive variables; among these are absorption and a preference for an imagic style of thinking. Absorption has been defined as a disposition, penchant or readiness to enter states characterized by marked cognitive restructuring. In subjects who report high absorption, the im-

aginative involvement can be so complete that the imaginings can sometimes be experienced as real.

Absorption has also been related to imagery vividness and subjects' preference for an imagic cognitive style of thinking. Good imagers appear to be able to generate details of imaginal experiences more vividly and effortlessly than poor imagers; this may result in a memory trace that is similar in quality to a trace of a perceptual experience. Thus, because of the qualitative overlap that may exist between traces emanating from real and imagined experiences, good imagers may be more prone to memory confusion than poor imagers. On the basis of the foregoing considerations, we predicted that subjects who prefer an imagic cognitive style of thinking, who demonstrate high absorption, and who are highly hypnotizable would also be more susceptible to memory confusion and not be able to differentiate a suggested pseudomemory from true memory.

Procedure

Before the hypnosis session a short inquiry was conducted during which subjects were asked to think about and report on their activities on a night of the previous week. After the subjects had detailed the evening, the experimenter ascertained that they neither remembered awakening nor dreaming during the night in question. They were asked the time at which they had fallen asleep that night and the time at which they had awakened the next morning. After this inquiry a hypnotic induction procedure was administered.

...During hypnosis the subjects were age regressed to the night of the previous week that they had nominated during the prehypnosis inquiry. They were again asked to describe their activities during that evening. Once they reported falling asleep, the experimenter suggested a rapid time progression until they reached the halfway point of their sleep duration for the particular night. The subjects were then told: "I want you to tell me whether you hear some loud noises, some loud noises that may sound like backfirings of a car or door slamming, some loud noises. Listen carefully and tell me if you hear them."

If they did not report hearing the noises, they were prompted a second time with the following instructions: "Alright just attend carefully. Now tell me it's around [adjusted for each subject] o'clock, tell me whether you become aware of them now." If they reported hearing noises, they were asked a series of questions to allow them to elaborate on their memories...

Regardless of whether or not subjects reported the noises, the item was terminated with the following instructions: "Your mind works like a tape recorder and has probably recorded that information. Later on when you will be out of hypnosis again and you think about that particular night you will remember clearly everything that happened on that night." After this instruction the age regression was terminated, and the hypnotic session proceeded. The entire experimental session was videotaped.

After the hypnosis session the subjects were introduced to a second experimenter who interviewed them with a modified version of the Experiential Analysis Technique. The EAT involves gathering subjects' comments on viewing preselected segments of the videotape playback of their hypnotic session. The interviewer's main task during the EAT was to determine whether subjects believed that the suggested noises had actually occurred or had been suggested. This interview was audiotaped.

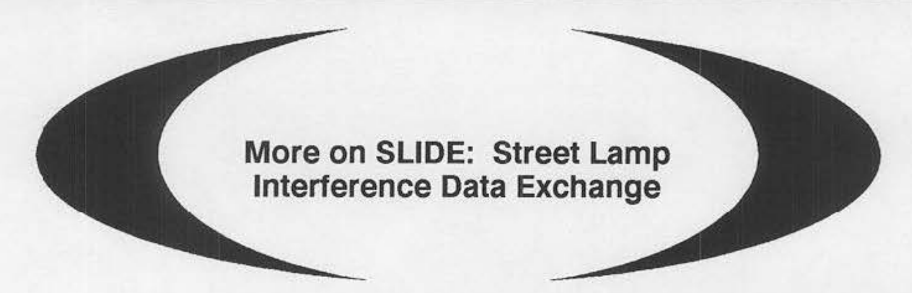
Results

The subjects were rated by three independent judges listening to the audiotape recording of the EAT as either (a) as incorporating the suggested memory, (b) as exhibiting confusion as to its origin, or (c) as failing the memory creation item....

Overall, 5 of the 11 highly hypnotizable subjects (45.4%), 6 of the 13 moderately-highly hypnotizable subjects (46.2%) and none of the low hypnotizable subjects were rated as passing the pseudomemory creation suggestion. This incidence of the memory creation effect for both highly and moderately-highly hypnotizable subjects was very similar to the 48.1% reported by Laurence and Perry (1983) for high hypnotizables.

Discussion

...The finding that it is possible to use hypnosis to create an autobiographical pseudomemory, for which no competing memory previously existed, in highly susceptible subjects, replicates earlier results. The results were extended by the finding that moderately-highly hypnotizable subjects also gave evidence of memory creation. Furthermore, a positive relation between hypnotic susceptibility and memory creation as established by the finding that low susceptible subjects failed to exhibit any form of memory distortion in this context. Importantly, the combination of hypnotic susceptibility and preference for an imagic cognitive style was found to be a stronger predictor of pseudomemory creation than either of these variables considered in isolation.



More on SLIDE: Street Lamp Interference Data Exchange

A few issues ago Hilary Evans told us about his project to collect information about people who appear to affect street lamps. Here is an update on his project, excerpted from his own newsletter called Sliding (#2, January 1991). You can write Hilary at 59 Tranquil Vale, London SE3 0BS.

The SLI effect is real: It is hard to reach any other conclusion after reading the accounts sent by dozens of respondents to SLIDE. That doesn't mean we know what is happening (though we are beginning to put some ideas together), What it does mean is that we are not chasing an illusion: This is an experience which many people have. Even if it should turn out that there is no cause-and-effect link between the witness and the event (though that doesn't seem likely) the fact that so many people believe there is a link would itself be something worth investigating.

The one thing that comes out loud and clear, from letter after letter, is the relief SLIders feel finding they are not alone --that this is something which happens to others.

WHAT HAPPENS?

The stories told by people who have responded to SLIDE are so varied, it seems they have only one thing in common: Street lamp go out. From then on, there are so many variations that it's difficult to draw any clear parameters.

Most SLIders only turn lamps off, but some people turn them on, and others change the state of the lamps (turning them off if they're on, and on if they're off).

Frequency: SLIders fall into three categories: Those who live with such experiences more or less continuously; those who have it happen only intermittently; and those who have it happen maybe only once and never again.

Type of lamp: Variable responses with some people saying mercury vapour, others only sodium lamps.

Distance from the person: Reports vary tremendously. Probably a majority says SLI occurs when the person passes beneath the lamp, but we have almost as many cases of people being over 50-100 m away.

How long does the effect last: SLIders don't usually stay around long enough to see when the lamps come on again, though they are generally reported as functioning ok the next day. Some affect the lamps for longer ('it is off for about a week until the highway department fixes it, then I put it out again.'). Another dims the lights rather than extinguishing them.

The implication is that the SLI effect is not on the lamp as such, but on the status of the lamp, as brought about either by switching or by the state of the components.

Experiences with other appliances: Probably a majority of SLIders have experiences with other kinds of light, other electrical appliances, sometimes even with NON-electrical appliances (esp. wind-style watches).

Examples: "When I would come home from work, usually irritated by a crowded subway ride, the first light I would put on would 'pop' and be burned out. Also other appliances wouldn't turn on when I touched them and someone else would have to turn them on. One day the woman in the office next to mine called me over and really made me angry, suddenly all the lights in her office went off and the switch plate was too hot to touch. The maintenance man was baffled because she was on the same circuit as the rest of the offices and only hers went out."

One SLIder reports when he sits next to a radio in tune "it will be badly out of tine when I step away. And vice versa. This effect is so pronounced and occurs so frequently that one friend dubbed me 'radioactive'."

Other SLIders seem to confine their activities to street lamps, and have never had problems with other electrical devices or other lights.

CAN SLI BE DONE TO ORDER?

Almost everyone says NO to this, but there are exceptions. One woman did it once very consciously for her husband; another man "kept concentrating but one would go out. However, as soon as I gave up,' one went out."

WHAT CAUSES SLI?

I think we can dispose once and for all the explanation which most people immediately suggest, that the light-sensing devices on the lamps are being accidentally triggered. Apart from obvious objections such as, if they are so easily triggered, why isn't SLI happening all the time, there are patent contradictions. For example, one respondent tells us that SLI happens with both his cars, but only when he is using them,not when his wife is using them. Also, SLI occurs frequently when the subject is not in a car.

It seems reasonable to assume that for SLI to occur what is required is a convergence of three elements:

(1) Someone with the necessary ability
(2) The appropriate circumstances
(3) A suitable target

(1) With regard to the necessary ability we have further options:

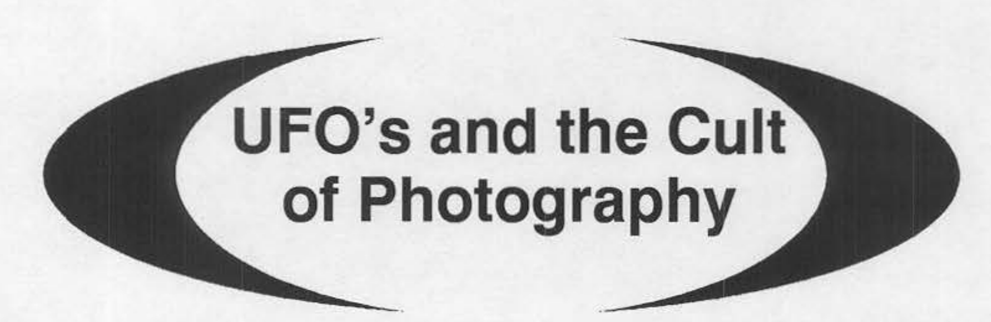
- maybe the ability to do SLI may be something we all possess.
- maybe only some of us - certain psychological types, perhaps, or with the appropriate biology or bio-electrical make-up have the ability
- maybe any - or perhaps just some - of us may acquire the ability, temporarily or permanently, if suitable circumstances occur. (One respondent never experienced SLI until he had a very severe accident at work involving electrical welding apparatus. Since his accident, he has experienced SLI 'at least 100 times' witnessed by friends and relatives.

(2) With regard to the circumstances, the general feeling is that SLI is clearly liked to states of mind. However, there is considerable disagreement as to which states of mind are most likely to cause SLI to occur. Reported examples include anger and terror; happiness; concentration; 'heightened consciousness'; heightened emotion of different kinds; "times of great stress, but the kind of stress that is prolonged and not acute at any particular point, and which for that reason must be submerged and lived with in order to continue daily functioning on the job, etc." Some SLIders have no sense of emotional causation.

(3) With regard to the question of target, an analysis of the physical parameters of the process suggests the most likely mechanism is a surge in the voltage of the circuit, causing the protective automatic cut-out to be triggered.

Whatever SLI may be, it is a very human phenomenon, with links to our feelings and states of mind. While on the one hand we investigate the physical process involve din SLI, on the other we must take into account the implications of interaction with the human mind.

Because so much remains to be done, I am for the moment taking a cautious attitude towards the media who, as SLIDE gets to be better known, are beginning to scent an exciting story. At this stage, I feel it wisest to keep a low profile in this respect, as it would be irresponsible to put out ideas about SLI until we are reasonably sure they're the right ideas. On the other hand, I realise that some publicity -- the right kind of publicity -- could be helpful in that it would bring in more input, both from people who have had SLI experiences and from those who may have useful ideas on the subject.



UFO's and the Cult of Photography

I first met Sharon Sandusky, who contributes the article below, as part of the team filming a panel interview with myself, Richard Hall and Dan Wright for a CUFOS video project. Sharon has an MFA in Filmaking from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, postgraduate fellowship experience in Frankfurt, Germany, and a BA in visual art from Antioch College in Yellow Springs. Her emphasis has been in experimental film and propaganda film analysis.

How the Unfilmmable Engenders a Crisis of Reality: UFO's and the Cult of Photography

by Sharon Sandusky and Edward Shelton

(originally published in Segnocinema, an Italian film journal)

While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things that are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal. -- II Corinthians 4:18

The photographic image holds a unique authority in the western world to represent an accurate record of reality. Most mediums are susceptible to a criticism of authenticity. A writer's motives can be questioned; a painter's experience can be challenged; but photography is capable of convincing the viewer that it represents reality. Our cultural presumption about the apparatus of filmmaking is that it records events in a manner 'faithful' to the event. This monopoly of reality is skilfully wielded by image rhetoricians to support or attack politicians, sway popular opinion and establish a regime's ideological doctrine as historical accuracy. These situations are instances of political expediency finding a filmable form. Before the camera begins its work, the Issue could have been decided in either direction -- film provides an anchor for a single perspective, attaching that imagined outcome to the populace's conceptions of reality (which we call consensus reality). The filmable exists in the tension between the imaginable and the possible. A successfully

persuasive film is one in which this tension is resolved, the imaginable having been subsumed by the viewer's mind into the possible and then the probable. It is a small step from the probable for this definition of reality to become what is true for the viewer.

Photography in these instances is a propaganda piece for consensus reality. It is being used to modify definitions of reality, to persuade the viewer of some 'truth,' but always within consensus reality -- thereby constantly reifying that reality. The extent to which the re-definition engendered by photography succeeds or fails is wholly dependent upon the degree to which the film sustains or diverges from consensus reality. Where a photograph's subject matter diverges widely from the mainstream, the definition becomes increasingly disbelievable -- that is, the filmmaker's task as persuader becomes more difficult. At some point the quality of disbelief changes the received message of the photograph. Disbelief increases such that the photograph can not be accepted by an audience. The audience's response can range from shock to ridicule, but the important repercussion is that the message intended has not been received -- persuasion has failed.

The characteristic of disbelievability adheres to the unfilmable. The unfilmable can be either actually unfilmable or simply effectively unfilmable. Actually unfilmable phenomena include those that technically cannot be filmed,such as nuclear fusion on the surface of the sun, and those that do not exist or have ceased to exist, such as fictional places (More's UTOPIA) or pre-photographic historical personalities (such as Moore himself). Effectively unfilmable phenomena include those where filming the phenomenon does not, in itself, provide a compelling belief in the phenomenon such as paranormal phenomenon (ghosts, telekinesis, extraterrestrial visitations etc.). The possibility of the unfilmable challenges our cultural preconceptions about film. Without our photographic records, we remain in doubt about the 'facts' of these events. Film becomes the primary evidentiary form for all events. The effectively unfilmable presents a broad challenge to consensus reality. In these cases, photographic records are not in themselves sufficient to convince people of the truth of an event. The image portrayed challenges such fundamental beliefs in the individual that the reaction to it becomes disbelief, and a searching for alternative explanations for the photograph's existence -- in direct contradiction to our predisposition to treat film as evidence.

If we think of photography as being capable of representing reality, how can some photographs be representations of something other than reality? THe unfilmable, through its failure to conform to consensus reality, drives individuals to find alternative accounts for its existence which can somehow be resolved within consensus reality. Alternatives suggested by disbelievers include: accepted phenomena which might be mistaken for the event represented, such as a blurry representation of the planet Venus or an aircraft; the result of some technical problem with the recording apparatus; or an intentional hoax. In this way our reality becomes limited to the capacities of a photographic machine. The filmable succeeds by existing within the human technology of film which we have forgotten that we have created. This amnesia becomes the proof of, and thus the sum of, our consensus reality. Photography is a displacement of experience memory, in favour of the more stable, but less true, token memory -- memorabilia. Photography can, at best, only be an indicator of that which is real.

A well documented example of the unfilmable can be found in the study of UFOs. The subject of spacecraft appearing in the night sky is probably the widest spread non-consensus reality phenomenon in modern times. Among the people who are earnest students of UFOlogy there are two principal types: the investigators and the UFO witness. The investigators evaluate physical evidence to determine presence or absence of UFOlogical activity, but the UFO witness claims to have had an otherworldly experience. Sometimes the investigator and the UFO witness are the same person, but not often.

The UFO witness has strong convictions in the reality of what has occurred. Sometimes there are physical correlations that can be made to the UFO event (eg corroborative sighting of the space vehicle, traces left of a landing spot, etc.), but to the UFO witness the primary proof of the event is the strong feeling of having seen a UFO, an object outside currently understood reality, but nonetheless a real object for the witness. It is the feeling which makes the experience real, to the extent that additional evidence can seem ridiculous; after having gone through such a strongly anomalous and transformative event, evidence becomes more like an afterthought, in the same way a souvenir is for the tourist. For the UFO witness, memory is the true indicator of UFO experience; an artifact becomes useful only to the extent that it can jog further remembrance.

For the UFO witness, "evidence" (through photographs or other artifacts) is unnecessary, it is taken as simply a token, or reminder, of experience memory. Occasionally a UFO witness will feel that it is important to convince others of the truth of the experience, and will use artifacts to do so, but often a UFO witness will be satisfied with others either believing or disbelieving a verbal account of the event.

For those who have not gone through a UFO experience, however, the desire for concrete evidence (including photographs) becomes necessary in order to accept the validity of the event. Sometimes this demand for proof becomes obsessive. From the UFO witness perspective, some investigators use inquisition-like tactics in their search for information that they can accept. These debunkers seek to invalidate the experience of UFO witnesses by demonstrating that individuals claiming to have had UFO experiences are mistaken, insane, or liars. Other UFO investigators realize that one of the consequences of conducting thorough scientific research in this realm is to challenge the dominant cultural belief systems. The concept of creatures from other planets that travel in spaceships, or even humans that travel in "flying saucers," implies a conception of humanity and our place in the cosmos which is at least as threatening to

our culture as Copernican astronomy was to Renaissance Catholics. Thus it is a hypothesis that many people are not willing to take on faith -- they want proof.

So what proof does a UFOlogist have? Some allege retrieval of extraterrestrial spacecraft debris. The problem is that, as in the case of the Roswell, New Mexico crashed disc of 1947, the potential 'evidence' is in storage by the US government. Some claim that odd markings on the earth are evidence of spacecraft landings. Other investigators consider the testimony of UFO witnesses to be evidence. Given the cultural disposition against such testimony, many of these witnesses are reluctant to talk about their experiences for fear of rejection.

Finally, there are photographs. As an unfilmable phenomenon, UFO photographs come under an enormous amount of scrutiny. Sometimes UFO photos that have the appearance of being beautiful documents of spacecraft are considered to be hoaxes. Some of the UFO photos that are considered to be the most credible contain indistinct, fuzzy outlines of shapes hanging in the air. It is not that there is a correlation between blurriness and authenticity, but rather that sharpness alone is not sufficient to secure the evidentiary value of a UFO photograph. For example, a photograph taken by an amateur may have little value to a UFOlogist because it may lack any terrestrial reference point, such as a tree limb, to indicate scale and distance. A problem with other UFO photos is that they are merely too blurry to be identified correctly. This reversal of our inclination to treat photographs as a recording of reality is a result of the phenomenon's divergence from consensus reality. Rather than treating these photographs as accurate documents, they are assumed to be hoaxes -- even where they cannot be proved to be hoaxes.

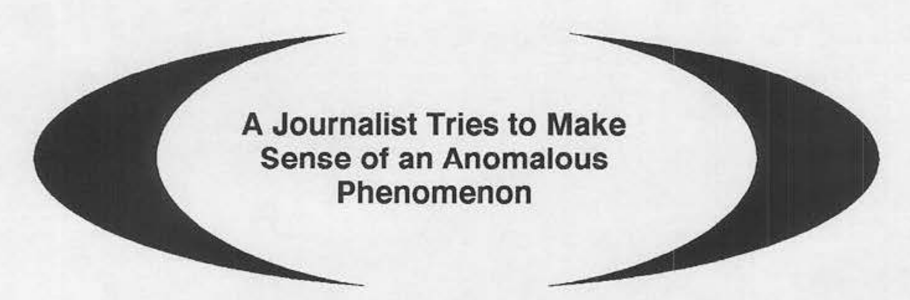
The very existence of hoaxes seems to raise difficult questions for the UFOlogist. Unlike most filmable phenomena, the UFOlogist must consider the possibility that the 'evidence' in any case may be the result of a staged rather than actuality photograph. It is not enough to simply evaluate the photograph on technical grounds; it must be evaluated on psychological grounds as well. This psychological component heightens the resistance to photographic documentation as evidence; it increases the unfilmable characteristic of UFOs. One such type of photograph may be generated by individuals believing so strongly in the existence of UFO's that, lacking sufficient physical evidence to document them, they stage documentation of such phenomena. The actuality status of the filmed event is not a significant problem in determining truth for these individuals.

The result of our cultural disposition to rely on photography as the primary means to document reality, and thus bolster belief systems, is a susceptibility to hoaxes, on the part of believers. THe uncovering of hoaxes in turn results in a higher threshold of disbelief and a more vigilant attitude toward photographic documentation. UFOlogy has established itself an unusual reality test: If it is photographed, be suspicious; if it is a good photograph, be yet more wary of fake documentation. An inverse evidence situation is also set up: The unfilmable has less hurdles to overcome to being considered genuine by believers, while the filmable is subjected to more skeptical examination.

Photographs serve as a reinforcement of the beliefs that people already hold. The filmable succeeds in presenting a perspective that can be resolved in the context of consensus reality. If an event is unfilmable, the faking of the filming serves only to make the resulting picture less real to the onlooker. The closer the attempt to film the phenomenon comes to being unintelligible, the more accessible it will be to believers. Its very unintelligibility as an image allows it to be resolved according to the believers' conception of reality. This paradox enforces he separation of such phenomenon from the mainstream, since an unintelligible image will remain unconvincing within the context of consensus reality.

Our argument for the unfilmability of UFOs is not to prove or disprove their existence or to examine the motivations of UFO witnesses and investigators. Our concern is that, given what we know about the difficulties of UFO investigation, photography alone cannot be used as an article of proof. As in a court of law, a photograph must be considered supplementary to the original narrative. The best evidence are physical traces, second are UFO witnesses, and third are photographs. All of these items together can create a case for the existence of UFOs, but photography alone must be regarded as a reinforcement of a belief system and not as messenger of truth. This makes it more suited to the realm of art than the realm of scientific inquiry.

In the realm of art, the filmable has the easier task of embodying the tension between the imaginable and the possible. In the realm of science, it must carry the added burden of being purveyor of truth. Problematically, reality confined to only what a camera can imprison on film is too small. Human beings have the ability to sense events which refuse to be confined to film. The unfilmable characteristics of UFOs may indicate that a broad variety of phenomena exist which we are currently incapable of recording. Rather than allowing our view of reality to be limited by the technical methods available to us in film, our inability to record certain phenomena can free us as human beings to be open in our evaluation and interpretation of events in the cosmos.



A Journalist Tries to Make Sense of an Anomalous Phenomenon

The following article, about the frustrations of a reporter trying to get an "establishment" scientific comment on an anomalous phenomenon (crop circles, in his case) reflects my experience in presenting this phenomenon to many of my colleagues.

Putting the Wagons in a Circle
by John Wilson
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Recently, I was commissioned to write a short scientific piece for a weekly newsmagazine. It was on the mysterious circles that have been showing up this summer in wheat fields in England and across the Canadian prairies. The prospect did not captivate me. Long-distance telephone conversations with people who believe that the superior intellect of extra-terrestrials leads them to hover at night over wheat fields in Saskatchewan are not near the top of my list of favorite pastimes. However, on the positive side, I would discover the scientific explanation of this phenomenon, or so I thought.

My first morning of research was spent on the phone to scientists at universities and government organizations across Western Canada. The responses I received ranged from apologetic verbal shrugs to rude brush-offs. No one was prepared to say anything. Not only were no studies being undertaken, no one was even prepared to venture a curious scientific opinion.

Discouraged, I prepared for an afternoon in the company of loquacious believers in visitors from other worlds. What I found was a surprise. All were sane, apparently rational people. Each exhibited good descriptive powers when it came to describing the circles and the media circus that surrounded their discovery, and only mentioned "other life forms" somewhat half-heartedly when pressed for a cause. All were interested when I put forward the synopsis of a theory for the circles' formation from a British scientific journal. One group was even busy collecting data in a scientific manner, but could not find any academics with the interest or the funding to work further.

I was left with a large telephone bill and precious little hard information for my article. What I had discovered was twofold. First, the trouble with the bulk of believers in extra-terrestrials was one of scientific illiteracy. They saw things clearly enough, but when forced to come up with an explanation that was not intuitively obvious, they could not differentiate between the rational and the irrational.

Common sense told them the circles were not the work of pranksters or ordinary wind, but it could not distinguish between alien visitations and a somewhat complex theory of unstable spinning vortices of air. They gave equal weight to both, and landed on the side which is most widely covered in the popular press and most interestingly propounded in books and magazines. Science had failed to give them a basic training sufficient for a rational conclusion to be drawn, and had failed to present a reasonable theory in a popular manner that could compete with New Age mysticism.

This brings us to my second discovery -- the unwillingness of scientists to make any statement on the matter. To be fair, there are a number of academics in Canada who are prepared to express opinions and give the scientific background on a wide range of issues. The point is not that these media-friendly scientists are prepared to talk, but rather that the bulk of the scientific community -- who are the people that local journalists will call before David Suzuki -- are not.

Given that no one has a mandate to work on these circles, there are several things that can be said by someone with scientific training. These circles are common (more than 300 were recorded in the south of England last year alone) and have been known for almost 1,000 years. The lack of any artifact associated with them suggests a cause such as moving air rather than shy alien visitors. The humming noises and lights that have been observed during ring formation are well-known phenomena associated with electrostatic charges on spinning air masses. Perhaps we cannot pin down the exact physics of the responsible air movements, but a lack of scientific study should not be equated with an inability to scientifically explain the phenomenon.

Any trained scientist can dismiss the wilder explanations for wheat-field circles. They are not caused by Satan, extra-terrestrials or mating hedgehogs. Yet no one I talked to was prepared to do that. Why? Perhaps because the previous press coverage of the circles had led them to fear being misquoted and exposed to the ridicule of their colleagues should they be quoted beside believers in "other life-forms."

Probably these are reasonable fears, but where does that leave the journalist? With a wall of silence from academia and an over-abundance of quotable quotes from everyone else, how is the story going to

be written? Deadlines have to be met and columns filled with interesting material. It is the responsibility of the scientist to present the reporter with that material, not of the reporter to conduct the research.

A recent study indicates that the level of scientific literacy among Canadian adults is low, although no worse than in Britain or the United States. Respondents tend to have a higher interest in scientific issues than a firm knowledge of them.

In an increasingly technical world, where the average person is being called upon to make judgements on complex scientific issues such as global warming, acid rain and reproductive technologies, a low level of scientific literacy is a serious handicap, both for the individual and the nation.

Such was the weight that the famous scientist and thinker T.H. Huxley placed on scientific reasoning that he maintained "irrationally held truths may be more harmful that reasoned errors." This places a responsibility on those who are scientifically trained to communicate their knowledge, even if this means using it in fields outside their own narrow discipline.

I did write the article. I quoted a believer in extra-terrestrials, an amateur researcher and an English scientific journal. I was left without a single world from the Canadian academic community and with a feeling that it would have been much easier to write the piece for the front page of the supermarket tabloids.

Some final words

Leo Sprinkle sent me some information on an innovative treatment for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder called Eye Movement Desensitization, but there wasn't room to include it in this issue. It'll pop up next time. Thanks, Leo!

And thanks to all who took the time to write, whether with a letter, biography or essay.

Write down your thoughts, musings, irritations, insights, laundry list, and send them in! Neatness doesn't count.

If you have not already sent in a biography to introduce yourself to the readership, you are most welcome to do so. This applies equally to long-time readers and new subscribers.

I particularly invite new readers from Canada who came on board after reading the Medical Post article to share some of their ideas with us.

This forum will continue as long as there is participation from the mental health and scientific community.

To be sure of being included in the next issue, contributions should reach me by the end of May.

Have a good spring, and may the forces of darkness become confused on the way to your house.

